



Whatever Happens, Whatever Comes

by Michaela Buzsaki Struchova

Note: Some dialogue was taken from the episode 'The Rest Is Silence' from the series 'Beauty and the Beast', written by Ron Koslow.

The sky above the city was turning dark pink, orange and purple in the distance ahead. Everything suddenly seemed quieter and the usual busy traffic eighteen stories below was almost muted, as if by magic. The late summer air was refreshed by the slight breeze gently caressing his still feverish face through the light drapes waving in front of him.

Such beauty, such colours, so much tranquillity and yet, I cannot find peace within myself...

The light stir in his heart and the quiet movement behind him made him aware of her approach. Her soft voice broke through the silence hanging in the air as if before the storm.

"You're feeling better..."

"Yes..." Vincent's reply was barely audible when he bowed his head in shame.

"I'm sorry..." he whispered with a broken voice.

Catherine's heart almost broke hearing his words, as she touched his back and stroked it gently in circles, trying to comfort him. She knew he was referring to almost destroying her apartment in his feverish battle with his inner demons and his Other, when he had come to her in terrible despair a few days ago.

"Oh, Vincent... Don't be sorry..."

"It's been my struggle always and now... when I have so much to fight for... I'm losing..."

Vincent's voice was strained, very quiet; with all his remaining strength, he was fighting back the tears.

Oh, love... How can I help you?

Catherine's mind was racing, trying to find the right words to encourage him.

"Maybe the worst is over," she said, still stroking his back with one hand and holding his arm with the other one. She hadn't looked away from him since she had joined him at the steps leading to the balcony.

Vincent bowed his head again, afraid to look into her eyes. "If it's not, I..." he started and found the courage to look at her at last. "It's best I'm Below; I should go back."

Catherine regarded his sweat-covered face, the damp golden strands of his hair lining his face, the pain and despair in his glassy, but still beautiful blue eyes.

The setting sun gave his hair colour shades she had never seen before. How ironic that he could finally see the proper light of day under such cruel circumstances?

She swallowed hard and looked out into the city before speaking. "It'll be dark soon."

"Catherine..." Vincent interrupted the train of her thoughts quietly.

She looked up at him again, eager not to miss a single word - her big green eyes watching him with apprehension, but at the same time, with so much compassion, care and love, he had to lower his eyes for a moment from the intensity of it.

“I don’t know what will happen now...”

Catherine kept watching him for a moment and then spoke with resolve in her voice. “You must promise me one thing... That you’ll share it with me.”

Vincent bowed his head in defeat before Catherine added adamantly, her eyes burning into his face demanding his word.

“Whatever happens, whatever comes.”

Vincent didn’t look up to her, but his arm went around her shoulders. He pulled her into his embrace, leaning his cheek against the top of her head. When he spoke, his voice whispering into her hair was soft like a touch of a butterfly, and when he kissed her hair, she shivered.

“Whatever happens... whatever comes... Know that I love you...”

Catherine closed her eyes shut and frowned in pain, unable to keep her tears away when hearing those words. Her arms went around his waist and held him tight as if her life depended on it. How long had she waited to hear him say it? And yet...

“Don’t.... Don’t say goodbye to me, Vincent... *please*, don’t...!” she begged quietly, clinging to him desperately, her tears wetting the sweat-soaked shirt on his chest. She could hear his heartbeat; it was faster than usual, but the sound of it was so alive, so sweet...

He kissed the top of her head again, lingering on the spot for a bit longer than he usually would, as if this tiniest intimate connection with her body was giving him a lease of life, which was hanging by a thin thread now. He knew they were both aware of the danger, the possibility of what might happen soon - the fact that she might never see him again.

They stood in a tight embrace until the sunset, awakening the city lights calling him home, down Below.

Home... This is my home... Catherine is my home...

When Catherine knew the time had come, she pulled back from his arms reluctantly to look at him. She could barely make the details of his face in the dark but the light in his eyes was there to guide her. Those eyes, which enchanted her right from the first time she properly looked into them and had always led her to the right direction, they had led her home, to him...

And it was those eyes that regarded her now with such deep devotion, love and longing, that it almost broke her. He was so fragile, so weak in body, and his spirit was bruised so much.... But she knew he was right; if this wasn’t over, he needed to be down Below. And if it got worse, she would be there with and for him, no matter what.

Catherine’s hand went up to his face, tenderly stroking his cheek. She saw his eyes shut for a brief moment, savouring the sensation of her touch.

She withdrew her hand slowly and walked away from him to retrieve his vest, cloak and the leather pouch with her rose. She still hadn’t turned on any lights as if afraid that once she did, Vincent would disappear forever.

When she returned to him, wordlessly, she helped him to put on the vest over his shirt, the cloak and hung the pouch on his neck. As the time of his departure was drawing frightfully near, she couldn't bear to look into his eyes again, pretending to adjust the leather straps on the cloak.

"I just managed to get the vest dry... I only got time to wash it the day before yesterday; Peter had brought some change of clothes for you, but I know this vest is your favourite and I... I just wanted..."

Her voice broke, she felt as if her throat was closing, imprisoning all the words she was still dying to tell him.

Vincent stilled her trembling hands on his chest and leaned his forehead against hers with a deep sigh. His heart was racing again; he felt his temporary calm state of mind slowly drifting away. The struggle between his longing and his reason cost him so much...

As never before, he desperately wished for his demons to vanish, to cast away the terrible fears, to still the Other inside of him, to understand why this struggle had to be and how he could stop it. All he wanted was to fall asleep in her arms and forget about all the pain, all the agony, fear and rage tearing him apart...

But he knew the only way to keep Catherine safe was to be as far from her as possible; he *had to* keep her safe from the Other...

You must go, now! Now, before it's too late...

Renewed sweat covered Vincent's face; a terrible heat started attacking his veins again. Voices of a long time ago were creeping into his head, as they had been for many days now. His breathing was getting ragged; panic was threatening to overwhelm him.

Catherine looked into his eyes, which were now reflecting the city lights, and she knew... Her hands cupped his face, and her heart almost died of pain, seeing the tears streaming down his cheeks.

Her vision got blurry as she pulled his head down and placed a long warm kiss on his forehead and then on his cheek. Her lips stayed there for a few moments, trying to bring some calm into the storm of the heart of her beloved, wanting to kiss away his tears. She pulled back slowly and watched his glistening eyes, her hands still not leaving his face.

"Whatever happens, whatever comes.... Come back to me...." she whispered and smiled.

I'll be waiting for you, my beloved, forever if need be...

A bittersweet smile appeared on Vincent's slightly panicked face before he exhaled loudly, pulled her into his arms and clung to her tightly in despair, almost crushing her, his tears never stopping to flow.

Catherine wished he would never let her go. If this were how they would spend the rest of their lives, standing at the threshold between her apartment and balcony in each other's arms, she would gladly accept it. But she could feel the agitation rising in him, the battle for the fragile balance between the gentle soul and the powerful Other waking up again. She knew it was time to let him go.

Vincent shared her feelings, as always. He pulled back from her, slightly trembling, still holding on to her hand as if to a lifeline. His eyes met hers, and in that single moment, time stood still, and the inevitable happened - Vincent slowly bent his head closer to hers and their lips met.

If this is the last time I'm supposed to kiss you, Catherine, I am taking the sweetest gift to my grave that I could ever get...

Catherine was shivering when he pulled back from her and leaned his forehead against hers. They were both breathing deeply. She desperately wanted to hold him forever, but her reason quickly brought her back to reality. She smiled and stroked his cheek.

“It is time...”

Vincent sighed and nodded, releasing her hand he was holding at his heart. He walked out onto the balcony, with Catherine following him behind.

Stopping in the corner just before climbing over the balustrade, he turned back to her.

Catherine almost forgot to breathe - after days of seeing him broken, fragile and fighting for his life, Vincent suddenly seemed incredibly majestic in the lights of the night. He straightened up; the evening breeze picked up a few strands of his golden hair, giving him a softer look, and for a brief moment, his eyes were clear and filled with a serenity that he hadn't known for weeks now.

Even if he didn't speak, she would have known the words, just by what she saw in those eyes at that moment.

“Remember... I love you...”

His soft voice brought new tears to her eyes, and yet, she didn't want the last image (what she hoped for the time being) of her to take with him to be a sad one, and she braved a warm smile at him, feeling her heart thumping in her throat.

“And I love you...” she said, making Vincent smile equally.

And then he was gone, and she found herself alone on the balcony.

Catherine fell to her knees and covered her chest with her hands gasping for air. Then she looked up to the sky.

“Dear God, please.... Help him!... Give him the strength to deal with whatever is torturing him! And then.... *Please*, let him come back to me!”

She was begging the Heavens, not even sure if anyone was listening but desperately hoping so. She covered her face with her hands and sobbed quietly, but heartbreakingly, into the stillness of the night.

From the shadows not much higher above her, Vincent was watching her for a few minutes, fighting the urge to go and gather her in his arms and kiss away the terrible pain they were both feeling. His eyes were burning again, and his chest felt like exploding. Before he disappeared into the darkness, he cast one last look at the woman he loved and whispered.

“Whatever happens, whatever comes, Catherine....”

END